
Let's Level the Training Field For Mechanized Infantrymen

FIRST SERGEANT JEFFERY A. HOF

Despite the technological advantages our infantry forces have been striving to achieve the past few years, mechanized infantrymen still find it difficult to gain access to schools—Ranger, Air Assault, and Sniper—that are offered to the other four types of infantry.

Each of these physically and mentally challenging schools develops and helps define the next generation of infantry enlisted leaders. The mechanized infantry of Force XXI would be tremendously improved by increased opportunities to attend similar challenging infantry schools. Mechanized infantry force commanders at all levels desperately need to understand the importance of this training.

Future success demands well-rounded and versatile noncommissioned officers, especially in light of the reorganization of the next generation Bradley fighting force. In addition to fielding the most modern vehicles, that force will have three rifle squads per platoon, consisting of nine infantrymen with one sniper team per company. (The current task organization consists of two rifle squads per platoon with one sniper team.)

Although Bradley proponents are planning, and in some instances operating, the new technological systems,

the computer chip will meet only a small part of our future needs. The Army's real potential lies with the infantrymen in our charge. The next generation infantry warrior needs leadership development, motivation, and highly honed tactical crafts.

The Ranger Course offers invaluable leadership training. Unfortunately, our modified tables of organization and equipment (MTOEs) now authorize only five Ranger-qualified NCOs—two staff sergeants and three sergeants—even though the new organization will authorize 16 staff sergeants and 25 sergeants. A sergeant first class cannot attend Ranger School because the MTOE does not authorize the Ranger additional skill identifier (ASI G) for that position, despite a current professional career management blueprint that strongly encourages those in the rank of sergeant through sergeant first class to become Ranger qualified. Nor is there an ASI G authorization for the company first sergeant—the master trainer, the leader above all other enlisted soldiers who sets and maintains the standard. The only acceptable standard for him is 11M50, regardless of his additional skill identifiers.

Many exceptionally skilled and motivated indirect fire infantrymen (MOS

11C) in other types of infantry units have long since graduated from Ranger school. Nonetheless, if they are assigned to mechanized infantry battalions, the opportunity to utilize their skill is not authorized. Meanwhile, there is a tooth-and-nail fight for each available Ranger School slot. Even with the execution of a battalion-level pre-Ranger program, any first sergeant in the light infantry would find himself frustrated by this shortage of school slots at a time when Ranger-trained NCOs are desperately needed.

The Army seems to think of the Bradley as a scaled-down version of the M1 Abrams tank. But the Bradley is an infantry vehicle that provides a superior fire platform, which requires enough capable NCOs both to lead dismounted rifle squads and to conduct 25mm direct fire engagements. Armored task force commanders with cross-attached mechanized infantry companies need these infantrymen to close with and destroy the enemy in order to complement the speed, agility, and firepower of the M1 Abrams. In the future, we will need highly skilled Ranger-qualified infantry NCOs even more than we need computer-literate infantrymen.

With the challenges that lie ahead in our reorganization, Ranger-qualified

NCOs will be essential in molding and leading the next generation of mechanized infantrymen. I graduated from Ranger School more than 12 years ago, and the lessons I learned helped me develop the sound teaching, coaching, and mentoring skills that have benefited those in my charge ever since.

The Ranger School's training places extraordinary demands on a soldier's mental and physical abilities, with minimum guidance, in stressful and sometimes chaotic situations. The next-generation mechanized infantry warrior deserves that same opportunity to hone his leadership skills—especially with the arduous challenge of maneuvering three rifle squads, employing a sniper team, and massing the firepower of the Bradley fighting vehicle.

The Air Assault Course also provides

skills that are critical to the future success of the mechanized infantry. These skills would help mechanized infantrymen train for the rapid movement of the dismounted rifle squads with the new task organization. Since there are only four Bradleys per platoon, the airmobility dimension of combat will be used to the fullest extent possible. With proper schooling, enough of our infantrymen will have the knowledge they need to teach, coach, and mentor their peers and subordinates when the tactical situation requires rifle squads to be airmobile. It is the traditional concept of passing on to someone else a learned skill that has made our NCO corps second to none.

As for the Sniper School, each of our companies is assigned an M24 sniper rifle, but has limited knowledge of techniques for effectively using its ca-

pabilities. Again, there is the problem of sending select soldiers to the school. Anyone can research the field manual that provides the basics of the rifle and the tactics required to employ it on the modern battlefield. But a school-trained NCO can bring back to his commander a wealth of knowledge that he has gained firsthand, and under stressful conditions, from the best snipers in the Army.

I am confident that these much-needed infantry schools can provide the vital skills that mechanized infantry will need in the future.

First Sergeant Jeffery A. Hof is a Bradley company first sergeant in the 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division. He has also served at the Joint Readiness Training Center, in the 502d Infantry in Germany, and in the 75th Ranger Regiment.
